



Art

Best in Show

Recommendations by R.C. Baker

**Bill Jensen**  
*Cheim & Read*  
 547 West 25th Street  
 Through March 24

Take 'em to Church

Painting has endured myriad deaths followed by numerous uneven resurrections, but a visit to just the first section of Jensen's show will restore even the most apostate video or performance artist's faith in this art form that predates recorded history. As animated as the shadows in Plato's cave, these dark paintings are leavened with golden gleams, unfathomably deep violets, and warm cascades of buttery black (Jensen makes his own intensely rich oil paints). Figure and ground are beside the point—we are in an elemental world where light wells up and recedes like the tides. The larger gallery lets loose with chromatic collisions of primary and secondary colors that have been scraped down, repainted, squeegeed, rubbed out—it's the agony and the ecstasy, and no bullshit. *St. Sebastian* (2005–06) has a white blob at its heart, patinated with purple and pierced by thick yellow strokes washed thinly with orange. Our minds reach back to Mantegna, Rubens, the Bible; our eyes are dazzled by luscious pigments and vibrant textures; our bodies sense the physical skill in the artist's slashing brushwork. Jensen himself has noted, "The matter in the Milky Way is the same as the matter in my elbow." In between are these paintings.



Courtesy of Cheim & Read, New York

**Bill Jensen's *The Five, the Seven (The Scream)***